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Productivity Slowdown: A False Alarm

THE EDITORS

A Crisis in Marxian Theory

PAUL M. SWEEZY

Nelson Rockefeller: An Anti-Obituary

ROBERT FITCH

Questions on the Woman Question

LISE VOGEL

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NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

The 30th anniversary of the founding of MR was celebrated on May 16th at a "party" held in the ballroom of the Hotel Diplomat in Manhattan. About 400 people turned out, many of them long-time subscribers and even a few going back to the first issue which appeared in May 1949. But by no means was everyone in attendance an old-timer: we take it as a good omen for the future of MR that there were also many young people. In addition to the editors and Jules Geller, Director of MR Press, those who spoke were Kathleen Gough and Mike Tanzer, both of whom have written for both the magazine and the press, and Eqbal Ahmad, Director of the Transnational Institute and an editor of the fraternal magazine *Race and Class*. Entertainment of a different kind was provided by two old friends, Pete Seeger and Yip Harburg. (Among the songs sung by Yip was one entitled "Birthday Song" which he originally wrote for the 15th birthday party of MR back in 1964, and to which he added a new verse for the 30th. Space problems prevented us from running it in this issue, but we will include it soon.) Presiding over the whole affair with her customary verve and grace was another old friend Annette Rubinstein, also editor of a fraternal (or should we say "sororal"?) magazine *Science &*

(*Continued on inside back cover*)

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PRODUCTIVITY SLOWDOWN: A FALSE ALARM

The recovery from the severe recession of 1974-1975 has been unable to solve two of the most persistent and oppressive diseases of the U.S. (and the world capitalist) economy. Employment did pick up as production advanced, but not enough to eliminate mass unemployment. And inflation keeps on going from bad to worse. What's wrong? Why can't something be done about these evils? A large part of the answer, according to our eminent thinkers and influential policy-makers, lies in a supposed slowing down of labor productivity: workers are simply not producing enough. Thus the *New York Times* lead story on January 26, 1979, introduced its description of the President's Annual Economic Report to Congress with the following opening sentence: "The Carter Administration told Congress today that lagging economic productivity had reduced the country's capacity to create more jobs and higher living standards." In fact, Carter went further, tying the issue of productivity to inflation:

> If we ignore the realities of slower productivity growth—if governments continue to press forward with unabated claims on resources and private citizens continue to demand large gains in money incomes—our inflationary problem will worsen.

Such pronouncements come not only from the White House. They have also been pouring out of diverse "authoritative" sources at an increasing rate in the last few years. Back in 1977, a *Business Week* editorial put it simply and directly:

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As a matter of simple arithmetic, there is only one way the United States can achieve its goal of rising incomes with stable prices: It must increase the output per man-hour of its workers—that is to say, raise productivity. (February 14, 1977)

And as this is being written, a major round-up article in the Business Section of the *New York Times* informs us that "experts warn nation about slower growth":

Economists, businessmen, and government officials have become concerned about a marked drop in the nation's productivity growth rate, a development they fear will reduce economic growth and increase inflation and unemployment. (May 8, 1979)

Before we begin to analyze the validity of what has thus become an accepted tenet of the conventional wisdom, it should be noted that what is being discussed is not a *decline* in labor productivity. Even if we accept the official statistics at face value, all that is being claimed is that the rate of *increase* in labor productivity in recent years has not been as large as it was in the early postwar decades. It is this slowdown in the rate of growth of output per man-hour that is claimed to be at the root of the economy's recent troubles. If we look more closely, however, we find that this "fact" is a phoney based upon statistical mystification and involving woefully fallacious thinking.

Productivity and Inflation

Let us first of all get rid of the notion that the presumed slowdown in productivity has anything whatever to do with the persistence and more recently the acceleration of inflation. There are three main ways in which productivity and prices are or might be related to each other. First, there is the effect on prices of wages growing at a faster rate than productivity. In this case, assuming unwillingness on the part of capitalists to see their profits reduced, prices would rise. A second influence of productivity on prices could arise in a situation in which production is insufficient to meet demand. On this assumption, an increase in productivity might be translated into an increase in supply, which in turn would hold down price rises. The third way would involve reduction of prices by capitalists to reflect lower labor costs per unit of output resulting from an increase in productivity.

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As to the first point, the facts are quite clear: *real* wages have been lagging behind the growth in productivity. Workers' paychecks have of course been rising, but these increases have been desperately chasing after the upward spiral of prices, barely managing to keep pace with the rising cost of living. Table 1 (see page 4) presents real average weekly earnings of nonfarm workers in private industry for selected years in the period 1967-1978. As can be seen, gross average weekly earnings (before payroll deductions) were $101.84 in 1967. Adjusting for the rise in consumer prices, average weekly earnings since then have been merely hovering around the 1967 level; the advance by 1978 was only a little over 2 percent above the 1967 level. Thus the increase in real wages that did take place was obviously insignificant compared with the over-16-percent growth in productivity shown in Table 1 for the period 1967-1978.*

The second possible relation between productivity and higher prices noted above certainly has no relevance in today's world. Can anyone seriously believe that our inflation is due to shortages of supply? Least of all could this be thought to be the case in 1975, the year of the most severe postwar recession, with an official unemployment rate of 8.5 percent and manufacturing capacity being used at only 73.6 percent of total. And yet that was the year when consumer prices rose by 9.1 percent compared to 5.8 percent the year before—an increase in the rate of inflation of nearly 50 percent. Nor could one rationally argue that an insufficient supply of goods and services caused infla-

* Unit labor costs have of course been rising along with the advance of nominal wages (unadjusted for price changes). But the claim that wage increases and a relatively slow growth in labor productivity have damaged the competitive position of U.S. industry is simply not true. The fact is that the rise in productivity has been combined with an increase in wages *slower* than that in other advanced capitalist countries. The result has been an increase in unit labor costs in the United States *lower* than that in major competing countries. A recent Labor Department study concludes: "With exchange rate changes taken into account, the United States showed the lowest average rate of gain in unit labor costs during 1970-1977, 6 percent per year; Japan had the highest average rate of gain, 17 percent; and the ten foreign countries combined had an average gain of 13 percent." Keith Daly and Arthur Neef, "Productivity and Unit Labor Costs in 11 Industrial Countries," *Monthly Labor Review* (November 1978), p. 17. The ten foreign countries referred to are Canada, Japan, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

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Table I
Productivity vs. Real Earnings of Nonagricultural Workers in Private Industry

Year	*Productivity Index (Output per man-hour) 1967 = 100*	*Gross Average Weekly Earnings[a] 1967 Dollars*	*Index 1967 = 100*
1967	100.0	$101.84	100.0
1970	103.1	103.04	101.2
1975	110.5	101.45	99.6
1978	116.5	104.30	102.4

(a) These are weekly earnings before payroll deductions for social security taxes and for federal, state, and local income taxes.

SOURCE: The productivity index is from the *Economic Report of the President, January 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979). The weekly earnings are from *Monthly Labor Review* (March 1979).

tion to flourish during the subsequent recovery period. In 1978, three years after the bottom of the recession, manufacturing firms were operating at only 84 percent of capacity, according to the Federal Reserve Board. With that much idle capacity and with millions of unemployed actively seeking work, there surely is no need to rely on a speed-up in productivity to get more goods and services produced. The real problem confronting business is not how to increase production but how to sell what is already being produced. That is why so much effort has been and continues to be devoted to sales promotion and to the ballooning of consumer credit.*

The third possible connection between productivity and prices has to do with the hypothesis that savings in labor costs arising from greater output per man-hour will end up in price reductions. This was not only reasonable but demonstrably correct—100 years ago. During the quarter century 1873-1898, a period of rapid mechanization of American industry and hence sharply rising labor productivity, wholesale prices declined by

* Although economists stress the role of supply shortages as a cause of inflation, things often work the other way around in the world of monopoly capitalism—prices are raised because of *softness* in demand! A few years ago, the leaders of the aluminum industry gave precisely that reason for a new price hike. The latter was needed, they explained, to compensate for a decline in the volume of shipments.

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nearly 50 percent.* But that was also a period of fierce competition in industry, so fierce indeed that it had already begun to produce its own negation in the form of the great merger movement which transformed U.S. capitalism from its competitive to its monopoly stage. Since the end of the nineteenth century, productivity has continued to increase, but price behavior has been very different. Taking 1898 = 100, wholesale prices rose to 208 in 1923, 331 in 1948, and 530 in 1973.** There are of course still some old industries in which savings resulting from productivity increases end up in reduced prices. In addition, new industries still go through a competitive phase during which declining labor costs are matched by declining prices. Nowadays, however, the preponderant behavior of business firms is to grab every opportunity to raise prices, whether productivity is going up or down. New models and new packaging are designed not only to defend or increase market shares but also to provide opportunities to hike prices. When Japanese cars become more expensive in the United States because of the decline of the dollar against the yen, the U.S. automobile companies promptly raise their prices too. The strategy typical of the giant monopolistic corporations that now dominate our economy is to take advantage of increases in productivity to expand profits and/or intensify sales promotion, *not* to cut prices.

In short, whatever may once have been the case, the notion that higher labor productivity will help control inflation belongs in our time to the fantasy world of bourgeois economics. It has nothing to do with the real world of monopoly capital, least of all in the midst of the general stage of stagnation in which capitalism finds itself bogged down today.

What the Productivity Statistics Mean

We now turn to an examination of the measures of productivity that are supposed to demonstrate its declining rate of growth. On this it is important to be clear that the government's statistics (such as shown in Table 1 above) purport to measure output per man-hour for the *entire* private (non-government)

* Harry Magdoff, "A Note on Inflation," MONTHLY REVIEW (December 1973), p. 23.

** *Ibid*, p. 24.

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economy. All private productive activity is intended to be covered—the output not only of factories, mines, and farms but also of massage parlors, movie studios and theaters, night clubs, charitable foundations, private schools and hospitals, supermarkets, banks, and real estate agencies.

Apart from everything else, the purely technical problems of arriving at a quantitative measure of this hodgepodge of goods and services are enormous. In essence what the statisticians do is add up the costs of production (including profits) and then adjust the totals by means of price indexes to arrive at a measure of production. This process involves a great deal of estimation (or guesswork) and leaves room for a large margin of error both in the total figure at any one time and in the amount of change from one period to another. But to enter now into a discussion of the technical shortcomings of these numbers would only serve to divert attention from the more important question of what they mean.

What needs to be understood is that these data do not take any account of the *quality* of the output; at best, they measure only quantity. Significant as this omission may be in the measurement of goods production, it is specially serious in the case of services. For example, the productivity of educational institutions rises as the class load for teachers is increased. But at the same time the quality of education is bound to decline since each teacher has to deal with more pupils and can devote less time and attention to each one. Are teachers then producing more or less? Similarly, the closing down of the only hospital in a neighborhood and the transfer of patients to a hospital in a distant area may appear to boost the productivity of the remaining hospital workers, but at the cost of the quality of medical services. Measures of quantitative output in these and other service occupations are of necessity biased and can only have an ambiguous and limited significance.

There are of course activities in the services field where productivity has a fairly clear-cut meaning. This is so, for example, of the routinized clerical work in banks and insurance companies. On the other hand, there are very large areas in which many millions of workers are engaged, where questions of definition of output cast doubt on the meaning of productivity

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measures and therefore also on the inferences that can be drawn from changes in such statistics.

But that is not all. A further and in some ways more serious difficulty arises from the practice of trying to arrive at an overall measure of the productivity of *all* types of private economic activity. The reason for this is that output-per-man-hour trends in goods production and in services behave very differently. In the former the nature of production allows for extensive mechanization and hence for constant improvements and changes designed to simplify and routinize the labor process, reducing the quantity of labor required. In services, too, the use of machinery is growing, but on the whole it is limited by the very nature of the service functions. For this reason the growth of productivity in goods production is bound to be much faster than in services.

The fact that productivity rises more rapidly in one sector than in another would by itself not be especially significant *if*—and this is a big *if* indeed—there were no change in the relative importance of the two sectors. But what if, say, the production of goods were rising more rapidly than the production of services? Then the higher growth rate of productivity in goods production would pull up the overall rate. And conversely a growing relative importance of services would pull down the overall rate. Thus, even if there is no change in productivity trends in either sector, the fact that one grows relative to the other will introduce changes in the overall index of productivity.

And it is precisely this type of distortion that underlies and in fact dominates the statistics now being used in the outpouring of propaganda about allegedly lagging productivity. The relevant facts are given in Tables 2 and 3. In Table 2 (see page 8), changes in employment for selected years since 1950 have been grouped into three categories: goods-producing industries, services, and government.* Government is included in order to

* Transportation and public utilities are included under goods production. The reason for this is that even though the output of these industries is non-tangible, a significant portion is directly used in goods production. In any case, employment in this borderline group of industries is less than 6 percent of total employment, so that even if these sectors were classified under services neither the statistics nor the conclusions to be drawn from them would be significantly affected.

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Table 2
Employment By Type of Industry

	Total	*Goods-Producing Industries*[a]	*Service Industries*[b]	*Government*[c]
			millions employed	
1950	52.3	29.7	16.6	6.0
1960	59.7	29.9	21.4	8.4
1970	74.4	31.6	30.2	12.6
1978	89.0	33.5	40.0	15.5

(a) Includes employment in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction, transportation, and public utilities. The data on agriculture are constructed on a different basis from those of the other industries in this table. Except for agriculture, these statistics include only wage and salary workers and are based on reports from the employing establishment. The data for agriculture include self-employed farmers as well as wage laborers, and the information is obtained from the monthly Labor Department field reports on employment and unemployment. Despite these differences, we believe that the above comparison fairly represents the basic differences in the trends of the three major divisions depicted.

(b) Includes employment in wholesale and retail trade, insurance, finance, real estate, and all other services.

(c) Includes employment in federal, state, and local government agencies.

SOURCE: *Economic Report of the President, January 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979).

present a more complete picture of the employment situation. Our attention, however, is focused on employment trends in the private sector. And there we can see a dramatic difference between changes of employment in goods production and in services. Employment in the former industries increased by only 3.8 million between 1950 and 1978, while employment in the latter grew by 23.4 million in the same period. From 1970 to 1978, the years in which productivity was presumably slowing down, employment in service activity increased more than 5 times as much as in the goods-producing industries (9.8 million compared with 1.9 million).

This big shift is further illustrated in Table 3 (see page 9). There we examine the changes in the distribution of employment in the private sector alone. And what we find is that the share of private employment in goods production declined steadily from 64 percent of the total in 1950 to about 46 percent in

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Table 3
Percent Distribution of Employment in Private Industry

	Total	*Goods-Producing Industries*	*Service Industries*
1950	100.0	64.1	35.9
1960	100.0	58.3	41.7
1970	100.0	51.1	48.9
1978	100.0	45.6	54.4

SOURCE: Same as Table 2.

1978. On the other hand, service employment jumped from roughly 36 percent of the total in 1950 to over 54 percent in 1978.

What this all adds up to is that the productivity statistics for the entire private economy obscure what is happening. The important development is not declining rates of growth of productivity as such, but a shift in the relative number of jobs away from the areas of rapid productivity growth to areas of slower-growing output per man-hour.* And these changes are due to the very nature of monopoly capitalism.

Monopolistic corporations compete by devoting an increasing amount of their resources, directly or indirectly, to sales promotion and distribution. In addition, the financial sector expands and becomes increasingly active in an incessant struggle to suck up an ever larger share of the surplus value produced elsewhere in the economy. Thus, more than one-half of the 10.2 million increase in service employment from 1970 to 1978 took place in wholesale and retail trade, and in finance, insurance, and real estate. Moreover, trade and many of the services act as a sponge for a large part of the reserve army of labor—in particular, Third World people, women, and undocumented aliens. It is there that the lowest-paying, temporary, and part-time jobs are to be found. Rather than a slowdown in productivity causing inflation, as our bourgeois savants fear, it is inflation that is pushing women seeking to supplement family in-

* For present purposes we are assuming that the official figures of productivity are reliable and meaningful measures. But, as noted above, this is a highly dubious assumption.

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come to cope with a spiral: cost of living into the low-productivity and low-wage areas of de and services.

Productivity in Manufacturing

The relatively slow growth of employment in goods production shown in Table 2 is of course due to a persistent increase in manufacturing productivity, faster in some years, slower in others. Declines do occur on rare occasions, but they are generally associated with some shock to the system as a whole such as war or depression. In Table 4 we can observe the annual changes in

Table 4
Production, Man-hours, and Productivity in Manufacturing Industries
1967 = 100

	Production	*Man-hours worked*	*Productivity (output per man-hour)*	*Annual changes in productivity (percent change)*	
1967	100.0	100.0	100.0		
1968	106.4	101.9	104.4	+4.4	
1969	110.0	103.7	106.1	+1.6	
1970	106.4	97.6	109.0	+2.8	Average 4.0
1971	108.2	94.2	114.9	+6.2	
1972	118.9	98.5	120.7	+5.0	
1973	129.8	103.6	125.3	+3.8	
1974	129.4	101.7	127.2	+1.5	
1975	116.3	91.7	126.8	–0.3	Average 2.3
1976	129.5	96.5	134.2	+5.8	
1977	137.1	100.3	136.7	+1.9	
1978	145.6	104.0	140.0	+2.4	

SOURCE: The basic data from which this table was computed are given in the *Economic Report of the President, January 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979). The production index used is the Federal Reserve Board's. The man-hours index was derived by multiplying manufacturing employment by the average hours worked per week. The productivity index was calculated by dividing the production index by the man-hour index.

U.S. manufacturing productivity since 1967. The uneven pattern of growth stands out, and there is one year (1975) of actual decline obviously reflecting the sharp recession of 1974-1975.

Now the interesting thing from our present point of view is that the uneven pattern of growth gives statisticians a chance

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to play a game of comparing rates of growth in different periods. As demonstrated in the table, it is possible by breaking the period 1967-1978 into two subperiods (1967-1973 and 1974-1978) to "prove" that the rate of growth of productivity had fallen by almost half in the last few years—i.e., from an average of 4 percent to 2.3 percent. But when the statisticians and government pundits make such a comparison they totally ignore (or conveniently forget) the similar decline in the growth of production. In general, there is a logical correlation between increases in production and in productivity, with productivity speeding up as production accelerates and slowing down as production growth is retarded. And that is exactly what happened in recent years. The average annual increase in manufacturing production between 1967 and 1973 was 5 percent while the corresponding average from 1973 to 1978 was 2.4 percent. To the extent that there was a drop in the *increase of manufacturing productivity* it is merely a reflection of the severity of the 1974-1975 recession and the consequent retardation in the growth of manufacturing production.

Rather than play the game of juggling averages for selected years, it is vastly more important, from both analytical and social viewpoints, to attempt to grasp the significance of the entire period depicted in Table 4. For then we learn that from 1967 through 1978 man-hours of employment hardly changed at all, while production forged ahead. In some of these years man-hours actually declined while the production curve continued upward. Over the twelve-year period as a whole, it took only 4 percent more man-hours to produce a 46 percent increase in manufacturing output. Imagine how much more unemployment there would be today if productivity had gone up faster than it did! And what is the outlook for employment and unemployment in the future if, as our country's leaders demand, productivity increases do indeed speed up?

Is Greater Productivity Really Necessary?

We cannot end this examination of the current phoney campaign about sluggish productivity gains without at least raising the truly fundamental question: Why do we need more productivity? If we were talking about a Third World coun-

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try, the answer would be obvious. There productive capacity in field and factory is woefully inadequate to meet the basic needs of the people. Because of that, a socialist country, or one striving to achieve socialism, would have to commit itself not only to provide jobs for all, but also to increase the capacity of workers to produce more.

But what about an industrially advanced country like the United States? Here we have a skilled labor force and an enormous productive capacity. If still more productive capacity should be needed, we have the knowledge and the means to create it—witness what happened during the Second World War. Yet despite all this available and potential wealth we have mass unemployment and poverty. Moreover, in addition to the army of unemployed, there are many millions presently engaged in wasteful and anti-social work who could be transferred to more useful productive activity. In view of the extent of our idle and wasted humanpower and of our enormous productive capacity, we surely don't need enhanced productivity to produce even much more than we are now producing. We have the productivity and the resources, in fact, to produce all that would be needed to eliminate poverty and provide everyone with fuller and richer lives.

Why then the desperate cry from Washington and the business community for ever greater productivity? The answer of course is to satisfy the crazy rationality of capitalism. An unrelenting growth in productivity is needed for one and only one purpose in this country: to enable capitalists to make greater profits and accumulate more capital. And since this necessity is so deep-rooted in the everyday operations of advanced capitalism, it has become enshrined as a cardinal myth of the ruling ideology.

It is about time to recognize the emperor's nakedness. The truth is that a rational society in the United States—one concerned with the people's needs and with the conditions under which they spend their working lives—would be more concerned with *reducing* than increasing productivity.

May 11, 1979

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NELSON ROCKEFELLER: AN ANTI-OBITUARY

BY ROBERT FITCH

It is altogether appropriate that Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, after more than seventy years, should have departed the scene. His public career can be interpreted as a series of efforts to turn whatever was free, living, and vibrant into something inorganic, fixed, and non-autonomous. He was the personal embodiment of Kurt Vonnegut's Ice-Nine, from the thin-lipped smile to the wing-tipped shoes.

He turned intellectuals into personal property, vital works of modern art into lifeless consumer goods. Under his guidance land became real estate. At his orders prisons became cemeteries. Urban planners inspired by his vision created miles of dead public space from the Albany Mall to the World Trade Center. His necrophiliac ambition, conceived in the late 1950s, to create a nuclear fall-out shelter for every home and public building went largely unrealized. But his efforts to destroy working-class neighborhoods and to accelerate the transformation of New York City into a headquarters town for multinational banks and corporations—those goals were largely achieved.

Nelson's public life and works, his peculiar energies and

Robert Fitch, an MR Press author, recently undertook six months' research in the Rockefeller family archives for his forthcoming book on cities.

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passions, have to be understood as a consequence of the demands created by the changing structure of the Rockefeller family fortune. Unfortunately, despite all the muckraking and revelations and the paranoid obsession with Rockefeller wealth and power, there has been little serious analysis of the evolution of the Rockefeller family's wealth and the social and political meaning of the change. What needs chiefly to be understood is that while the family fortune was built up in the nineteenth century on the basis of American oil and domestic manufacturing and mining investments, it has been gradually recycled into urban real estate, banking, and Third World investments. The core family properties are Rockefeller Center (with an assessed valuation of approximately a billion dollars—but listed at a quarter of that value at the Senate Vice-Presidential Confirmation Hearings) and the equity in the Chase Manhattan Bank and the International Basic Economy Corporation, a retail chain in Latin America. None of these enterprises, it must be conceded, has prospered particularly under family control.

In an important sense the evolution of the Rockefeller family fortune mirrors the transformation of the national balance sheet: the country's gradual transition from an industrial to a "service" society; from a land of smokestacks and lunch pails to a nation of shopping centers and briefcases; one which exports capital to the Third World while creating masses of unemployed and unproductive labor. Perhaps some of the lingering antagonism Rockefeller generated among his Republican colleagues—especially the conservative manufacturing interests in the South, Southwest, and Middle West—grew out of their gathering recognition that his New York City of the 1970s showed the future to the cities in their own regions.

More than any single individual, Rockefeller helped accentuate the polarization of the two New York cities—one virtually bankrupt and de-industrialized, with growing acres of burnt-out tenement rubble blanketing the sites of once well-established working-class communities in the outer boroughs; the other, the inner corporate Manhattan core, booming with the construction of speculative office buildings and luxury hotels and boasting the tightest luxury-apartment co-op market in the city's history.

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Of course Nelson did not create the system which drives wealth and poverty to these irrational and exaggerated extremes. But his main programs as governor of the state all had the same cruel focus: preserving and expanding the value of Manhattan real estate (of which his family was the largest non-institutional owner) and driving out all the classes, races, and industries which stood in the way. Consider some of these initiatives briefly. The World Trade Center: obliteration of the lower West Side industrial barrier to the expansion of Wall Street real-estate values across lower Broadway. Westway: elimination of all existing neighborhoods, employment, and structures between the Battery and Forty-Second Street which lie across the path of high-rise office and luxury apartment-house redevelopment. The Urban Development Corporation: a debt-propelled state housing agency (hypocritically dedicated to the memory of Martin Luther King), whose main accomplishment was a state-subsidized housing development where rents start at $510 a month. The Rockefeller emphasis in the Mitchell-Lama program: rerouting public funds away from the poor and working classes and directing them into the construction of upper-middle class residences, particularly in strategic locations where a Manhattan neighborhood could be "won away" from real-estate undesirables, e.g., the transformation of "Hell's Kitchen" to "Clinton" through the creation of the $400-million Manhattan Plaza. The Rockefeller mass-transit program: aimed at servicing high-rise office buildings, including his own, with the building of the most lavish city subway station under Rockefeller Center, while promoting the gradual deterioration and shrinkage of the system in the industrial outer boroughs.

These programs for capital construction generated an immense amount of debt which the financial "community," led by the Chase Manhattan Bank, was all too happy to service—at least until the inevitable cyclical crunch which sent them sprawling. Give Nelson credit for one thing however: his resignation from the governorship and the appointment of a successor on the eve of the collapse of involved state agencies showed the family's extraordinary sensitivity to the requirements of public relations which once again were widely mistaken for public service.

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How should we draw a balance on the private life and character of Nelson Rockefeller? Hegel warns indiscriminate detractors of the Great that no man is a hero to his valet: not because there are no heroes, but because the man is a valet. With Nelson, however, we are safely and indisputably in the presence of the mean-spirited valet puffed up by the cortisone of mass-media quackery to the stature of a philanthropic hero. Stories of his generosity flow feelingly from Henry Kissinger ($50,000 in gifts, plus a trust fund, plus the use of Nelson's private jet during his honeymoon with Rockefeller staffer Nancy Maginnes); from William "Fido" Ronan, former Metropolitan Transit Authority chief ($625,000 in uncalled loans); and from former Urban Development Corporation head Ed Logue ($250,000). For men like these, the myrmidons, gifts must come from Nelson's personal generosity, since any suggestion of a *quid pro quo* would be fatal to their integrity.

But the public record, established at the Vice-Presidential Confirmation Hearings, illustrates that Nelson, far from being some throwback to Medicean liberality, was the true forerunner of the "Me Decade." Following his father's death in 1960, counting other gifts from the estate, Nelson inherited approximately one sixth of a $1.2 billion fortune. Between 1957 and 1974 he gave about $25 million to charity. Some 70 percent of this sum amounted to what were in effect indirect gifts to himself. For example, Nelson would give to the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. The Rockefeller Brothers Fund would give to the Citizens Budget Commission which would then use the money to lobby for lower taxes on Manhattan commercial real estate. Then there were the gifts of Standard Oil stock whose appreciation created magnificent opportunities for avoiding capital-gains taxes in particular and tax vulnerability in general. So successful were these various stratagems that Nelson paid no income taxes at all between 1970 and 1974. Meanwhile, the care and feeding of his political ambitions alone absorbed $48 million of his personal fortune, an amount probably matched by drafts on his brothers!

All this compares unfavorably even with the grudging gifts of his grandfather, who wound up giving away over half a billion dollars. But then Nelson, unlike John D. Senior, never

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made any money. For the younger Rockefeller to have actually given money away would have been to undermine his capital position, to erode principal; and thus to help saw off the branch upon which he was so comfortably seated. A fact of key importance heretofore ignored: the family fortune didn't grow at all from 1960 to 1974—in real terms it declined. So it is possible to understand the change in habits of family generosity as a consequence of the change in the rate of accumulation of family wealth; a rate which is in turn tied to its base in urban real estate in northeastern cities; to overseas investment in threatened bastions of the U.S. empire; and to the general slowing down of the dynamism of American capitalism from its turn-of-the-century salad days.

Overall, Nelson's character illustrates Richard Sennett's thesis in the *Fall of Public Man*: the growing and pathological confusion of public persons and private personality produced by the decay of late capitalist culture. The intimate pokes itself inappropriately into the public, and the public crowds out true intimacy. Goatish, apparently to the very end of his life, Nelson enjoyed revealing details of his sexual conquests in public. According to a highly placed New York City labor leader, he turned these revelations to good political account in winning over local labor chiefs. "We were once having a Central Labor Council meeting," this union official recalls, "and all through the cocktail party that preceded it, the guys were standing around talking about 'Nelson,' about what a cocksman he was and all that. They were getting a terrific thrill out of the fact that here was one of the richest guys in the world and he encouraged *them* to call him by his first name and allowed them to get in on his sexual exploits."

While the labor chieftains were regaled with supposedly intimate stories of the adventures of the Rockefeller genitalia, the man himself seemed to lack the normal capacity for emotional connection where it would appear to be most called for. How sad, for example, to have delivered a staff-prepared, staff-researched eulogy on the occasion of his brother Winthrop's funeral in Arkansas!

Nearly all Nelson's own mourners, professional and otherwise, have described him as a fount of inexhaustible energy.

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This is true, but the kind of energy needs to be qualified. His passion for law and order; his instinctual tropism for the *status quo,* the erotomania for equilibrium all add up not to vitality, but to entropy, which is indeed energy, but energy of a negative kind. And the demented attachment to the means of enforcing order comes across in consistently chilling fashion from his middle-aged enthusiasm for atomic-war games and strategies no less than from his elderly love of the instruments of police repression. At the Attica prison rebellion, after delivering the order to fire on the prisoners, Nelson charged that the ten dead hostages had been killed by the prisoners' knives. Autopsies soon showed however, that not a single prison guard had died at the hands of the inmates. A reporter asked Rockefeller, "What does this tell you about the prisoners, the fact that so many men [hostages] emerged unharmed?" Nelson replied, "What it tells me is the use of this gas is a fantastic instrument in a situation of this kind."

What it might tell us is that the most oppressed, brutalized, and degraded members of society showed more simple humanity, more forgiveness, and more real nobility of character than the senior member of the wealthiest, most celebrated and petted family in American history.

Nelson's life and the death of his moral superiors have to serve as an inspiration for those convinced that this country would lose precious little if its nominal aristocracy of wealth and power were to disappear in an upsurge of social justice. Never were Joe Hill's words more appropriate: "Don't mourn, organize!"

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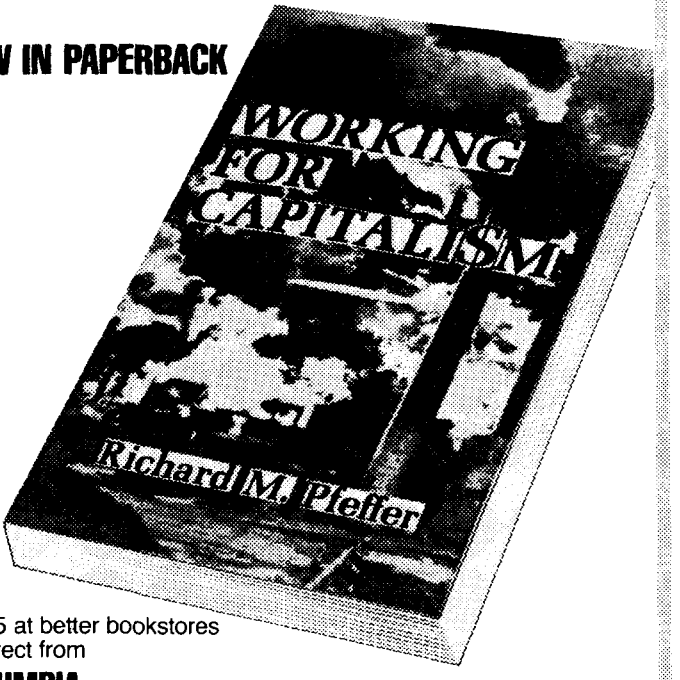

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A CRISIS IN MARXIAN THEORY

BY PAUL M. SWEEZY

I am sure that many of you are familiar with Thomas Kuhn's little book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), which has had an important and salutary effect on ways of looking at and analyzing the history of the natural sciences, and which has also aroused considerable interest among social scientists.

Kuhn challenges the traditional view that science develops through a gradual process of accretion, with a host of theorists and researchers building up the scientific edifice a few bricks at a time and always on the basis of the accomplishments of their predecessors. Not so, says Kuhn: science develops through a series of revolutions, each rejecting much that has gone before and starting on new foundations. His key concept is that of the "paradigm," which means roughly a way of looking at reality—or that part of reality which falls within the scope of a given science. To take the best known example, the paradigm of the cosmos which dominated human thought for thousands of years was geocentric, with all the heavenly bodies being assumed to move around a fixed earth as its center. Astronomy based on

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this paradigm was developed and codified in the Ptolemaic system and held the field until the Copernican revolution which abandoned the geocentric for a heliocentric paradigm.

Kuhn's idea is that when a new paradigm takes over—never, incidentally, without a struggle—it provides room for a more or less lengthy period of what he calls "normal science," i.e., the work of scientists who accept the new paradigm and seek to answer the questions and solve the problems which it poses or allows to be raised. But after a while "anomalies" begin to crop up—observations or research results which don't square with the paradigm and can't be explained in terms of the normal science to which it gives rise. What then happens is that efforts are made to elaborate and complicate the paradigm so that it will accommodate the anomalies, a process resulting in an increasingly messy collection of *ad hoc* additions and exceptions (as in the proliferation and modification of epicycles by post-Ptolemy astronomers) culminating in a scientific crisis. The way out is then found—usually by persons not trained in the accepted ways of perceiving and doing things—in a revolution which establishes a new paradigm. The whole process of normal science-anomalies-crisis-revolution then repeats itself. (I might add that this way of viewing and analyzing the history of science is very congenial to Marxism, though Kuhn himself is far from being a radical: there have long been conservative as well as radical dialectical thinkers.)

I want to suggest that Marxism, considered as a science of history and society, has in certain important respects reached a stage of crisis in Kuhn's sense. The underlying paradigm together with the normal science to which it gave rise have, in the course of the last century, produced an interpretation of the history of the modern world which is enormously powerful and which has had a profound influence far beyond the community of Marxists.

In barest outline, this interpretation sees the history of the modern world from roughly the beginning of the sixteenth century as consisting of the following major, and to some degree overlapping, stages: (1) the emergence of capitalism as the dominant mode of production (primitive accumulation plus bourgeois revolutions in the core countries); (2) the mercan-

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tilist stage of capitalism; (3) the competitive industrial stage of capitalism under British hegemony; (4) the monopoly imperialist stage of capitalism beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; (5) the global crisis of capitalism-imperialism beginning with the First World War; (6) the spreading proletarian revolution beginning with the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the emergence and spread of socialism as successor to capitalism and transition to the communist society of the future.

The foundations of this interpretation of the history of the modern world were laid in the pre-1848 writings of Marx and Engels (especially *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*). Theoretical deepening and elaboration came in *Capital* (volume 1, published in 1867). And the edifice was extended, amplified, and in a sense completed by the great revolutionary leaders of the twentieth century, Lenin and Mao Tse-tung.

It is a magnificent intellectual and scientific creation—far superior to anything achieved by bourgeois social science, if indeed we may use that term at all, considering that at least since the beginnings of the global crisis of capitalism bourgeois thinkers have been vastly more concerned with ideological justification of the system than with scientific understanding of its history and future. But—and this is the point I want to emphasize here today—as history unfolds in the closing decades of the twentieth century, we are finding more and more anomalies in the Kuhnian sense, i.e., deviations between observed reality and the expectations generated by the theory.

Obviously I couldn't attempt to explore all these anomalies in the time available to me, and to tell the truth the task would in any case be far beyond my ability. But I do want to draw attention to what I think is probably the most important of these anomalies. For Marx socialism was a transitional society between capitalism and communism. While he purposely refrained from drawing up blueprints, there is no doubt about what he considered the most fundamental characteristics of communism: it would be a classless society, a stateless society, and a society of genuine and not merely formal or legal equality among nationalities, races, sexes, and individuals. These goals would certainly be very long-term in nature and might never be fully

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achieved. But just as certainly they establish guidelines and rough measuring rods. Only a society genuinely dedicated to these goals and shaping its practice accordingly can be considered socialist in the Marxian meaning of the term.

Now, as I have already indicated, the generally accepted Marxian interpretation of modern history leads us to expect that capitalism will be overthrown by proletarian revolutions, and that these revolutions will establish socialist societies. The theory, in fact, is so taken for granted as a reliable clue to what is happening in the world that every society which originates in a proletarian (or proletarian-led) revolution is automatically assumed to be, and identified as a socialist society.

And this is where the anomalies begin. None of these "socialist" societies behave as Marx—and I think most Marxists up until quite recently—thought they would. They have not eliminated classes except in a purely verbal sense; and, except in the period of the Cultural Revolution in China, they have not attempted to follow a course which could have the long-run effect of eliminating classes. The state has not disappeared—no one could expect it to, except in a still distant future—but on the contrary has become more and more the central and dominant institution of society. Each interprets proletarian internationalism to mean support of its own interests and policies as interpreted by itself. They go to war not only in self-defense but to impose their will on other countries—even ones that are also assumed to be socialist.

All of this, I think, is now fairly obvious, and of course it is raising havoc among socialists and communists. I think it is no exaggeration to say that by now the anomalies have become so massive and egregious that the result has been a deep crisis in Marxian theory.

What is the way out? One way, which is clearly being taken by some Marxists, is to throw out the whole theory, abandon Marxism altogether, and retire into a state of agnosticism and cynicism—if not worse. But the trouble with this is that Marxism works as well as ever—and I would even say better—as a way of understanding the development of global capitalism and its crises: the particular anomalies I have been alluding to have no bearing on the validity of Marxism in this crucially

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important sphere. The part of Marxism that needs to be put on a new basis is that which deals with the post-revolutionary societies (with which, of course, Marx and Engels had no experience).

We do not need to rule out the *possibility* of a post-revolutionary society's being socialist in the Marxian sense. That would be foolish and self-defeating. But we do need to recognize that a proletarian revolution can give rise to a non-socialist society. I believe that it is only in this way that we can lay the basis for eliminating the disturbing anomalies I have been discussing.

Having recognized this, we can then proceed along one of two lines: (1) the hypothesis that the only alternative to socialism is capitalism, and (2) the hypothesis that proletarian revolutions can give rise to a new form of society, neither capitalist nor socialist. I believe that the second line is the fruitful one. The trouble with the capitalist hypothesis is that it quickly leads to as many anomalies as the socialist hypothesis. I said a minute ago that none of the so-called socialist societies behaves as Marx thought they would. Much the same can be said, only more so, if they are assumed to be capitalist societies: Marxists know a lot about the way capitalism works, and none of the post-revolutionary societies conforms to the pattern. They have plenty of contradictions of their own, but they do not take the same form as the contradictions of capitalism. If this is so—and I don't know of anyone who claims to be able to analyze their development in terms of capitalism's "laws of motion"—how can calling them capitalist lead to anything but confusion and frustration?

The new-society hypothesis, on the other hand, while not telling us anything about how these societies function, does pose exciting challenges for scientific work—and inevitably has profound implications for political practice. I firmly believe that it points to the path we should follow and offers us the best hope of resolving the crisis of Marxian theory which is now visibly tearing the international revolutionary movement apart.

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POLITICAL CHANGE, CLASS CONFLICT, AND THE DECLINE OF LATIN AMERICAN FASCISM

BY JAMES PETRAS

An important shift is taking place in Latin America as we approach the 1980s: the reactionary wave has bottomed out, with dictatorial and neofascist regimes increasingly on the defensive. This signals the reverse of a trend that began with the 1964 coup in Brazil and mounted in the early 1970s, when a series of right-wing military coups in Bolivia, Chile, Uruguay, Argentina, and Peru instituted a massive attack on the organized working class and peasantry. This was followed by moves to dismantle the national-development structure (public enterprises, protective barriers, etc.) implanted over the previous half century, which was so inimical to foreign capital. To many U.S. and Latin American business observers, therefore, the wave of neofascist and rightist regimes and their accompanying free-market economic policies–*cum*–political terror augured a new period of "stability" and economic opportunities. The consolida-

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tion of political power and the promotion of economic growth based on foreign bank loans, open doors to foreign investment, rising exports, and the lowering of labor costs encouraged overseas capital to plunge into the area once again. At the same time, the seemingly unassailable position of these regimes—strengthened by their control over the armed forces and secret police, as well as their support from international financial groups—bred pessimism and helplessness among many within left-liberal circles. It was thought that the best that could be hoped for was to "minimize" the loss of life, limit the excesses, and hope that the regimes would evolve in a more "moderate" direction as they consolidated their power.

However, such power has not been consolidated over the long term in Latin America. Rather what is increasingly evident is a clear ascent of popular-democratic movements in a number of important countries, representing the resurgence of mass organizations demanding democratic rights, social changes, and reversal of policies favoring the multinational corporations. This resurgence is the most significant factor in Latin America today. Nonetheless, it would be useful to keep in mind several reservations concerning the growth of popular opposition.

(1) The phenomenon is not uniform in all countries within the region. In some countries powerful political movements have developed, capable of organizing large-scale mass actions, while in others sporadic and isolated actions are still the norm.

(2) The emerging movements are subject to ebbs and flows, even within the countries where change is most evident. In many cases they are composed of heterogeneous political groups, some of whom easily shift back and forth between collaboration and opposition to government, between direct and discreet conflict with the regime's policies. Moreover, many of the popular organizations are still in the process of being constituted, and their periods of maximum mobilization have revolved around specific economic issues or political events. When these issues are resolved the movements tend to recede.

(3) The popular movements take a variety of forms, ranging from middle-class electoral fronts to autonomous working-class movements. The demands and trajectories of these movements and groups converge and diverge, so that the cumulative

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effort of their myriad activities do not always place a given regime in the most disadvantageous position.

(4) The ascending mass movements are still in a precarious position, still facing an entrenched state apparatus. While in a few countries some of the murderous activities of the secret-police apparatus have been curtailed, that apparatus continues to function and still possesses the capacity to strike back, and to do so in the massive and unrestrained fashion of the recent past.

Despite these reservations, the fundamental fact is the sharp *deterioration* of the seemingly invincible wave of rightist and neofascist regimes of the sixties and seventies. What all of these reservations should warn us against is the notion that the current resurgence is itself an inevitable new wave of democracy or social revolution. Obviously the situation in each country will play itself out depending on the correlation of forces, the nature and orientation of the new forces that move toward power, and how they articulate their policies in the context of the demands from below for sharp wage and salary increases to compensate for past losses on the one hand, and the imperatives of the world market, international financial groups, and the existing military apparatus on the other hand.

The Patterns of Opposition

We can distinguish four levels of opposition in Latin America today.

(1) *Revolutionary Situation*: continued mass mobilization and increasing radicalization, including direct challenges to the military incumbents and state power leading to massive armed confrontation.

(2) *Mass Mobilization*: the growth of mass organizations and the increasing incorporation of new layers of the population into electoral and mass opposition activity, leading to redefinitions of the condition of domination by ruling military juntas.

(3) *Incremental Opposition*: sporadic activities, occasional strikes, and protests confined to limited sectors of the population.

(4) *Stagnation and Repression*: little or no active opposition, with occasional protests by isolated groups or individuals.

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(1) The most developed and formidable opposition movement in Latin America is the revolutionary situation in Nicaragua, where the Sandinista guerrilla movement and the various and sundry civic fronts (the best known is the United Popular Opposition) are directly engaged in the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship through a variety of methods, general strikes, sabotage, popular insurrections, guerrilla warfare, economic boycotts, etc. Nicaragua has evolved toward a "dual power" situation in which two sets of forces are violently disputing state power: on the one hand Somoza, backed by the National Guard, and on the other hand the Sandinista front and the popular movement. The significance of Nicaraguan revolution, however, extends far beyond the overthrow of the dictatorial regime. The tens of thousands of workers, slum dwellers, and peasants who are increasingly armed and active in the resistance look upon the struggle as a means of transforming the socio-economic conditions that govern their lives; they envision not a liberal state but a popular government which gives highest priority to transforming the private empire of Somoza into the public patrimony of the people. With continuation and extension of the struggle against Somoza, the importance of the impoverished masses in determining its outcome increases; thus their interests will be an important force in determining the nature of the social and political transformation after his downfall. In an effort to head off this process of revolutionary change the United States has intervened to exclude the Sandinistas from governmental power, and, once Somoza no longer appears to be a viable representative of U.S. interests, to promote the conservative civic fronts as possible alternatives.

The most crucial concern of U.S. policy-makers, and the most significant aspect of the Nicaraguan struggle, however, is the impact of this struggle on neighboring Central American republics with rising mass movements. In El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, mass peasant and labor organizations are increasingly engaged in strikes and land occupations as part of nationally organized social and political movements. A popular victory in Nicaragua could serve to accelerate these struggles, raising the ante for all the military regimes in the area.

(2) At the next level of opposition, mass mobilization, we

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can locate at least three countries: Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil. Of these, the level and scope of opposition is far and away the strongest in Peru. With the growth of revolutionary mass organization among slum dwellers in the *barriadas*, sustained general strikes among trade unionists, and the takeovers of whole municipalities in the provinces, the situation in Peru begins to approach a prerevolutionary confrontation. After more than three years of crises and austerity, the current regime has lost all credibility and remains completely isolated, except for the politically costly support of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the international banks. Relying alternately on coercion and the promise of free elections, the regime totters on from one confrontation to another, its coffers empty, the streets full of demonstrators, the public offices paralyzed by sullen and hostile employees threatened by unemployment, its soldiers nervously fingering their sub-machine guns as they are pressed into action amidst the stifling smoke of tear gas and street barricades which increasingly define Peruvian urban life. More than anywhere else in Latin America, Peru appears to be heading for a massive confrontation between the military dictatorship and the populace. On the one hand, IMF-imposed austerity measures continue to force down the already low living standards of wage and salaried groups, with no signs of economic recovery; on the other hand, an increasingly mobilized and class-conscious labor force, intent on avoiding further pauperization, is increasingly committed to the revolutionary left.

In Bolivia the left is in place: the trade union and political parties have been reorganized, most of the established leaders and cadres are back in action, while the post-Banzer military regime promises elections in the near future. The corruption and scandals of the Banzer era (1971-1978) have nourished a broad array of non-working-class political and social forces around a series of electoral fronts, while the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) and its most important component, the miners federation (Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia, FSTMB), have reorganized, expelling former collaborators with the military dictatorship and laying the basis for autonomous working-class action. The opposition thus is composed of two major formations: the Unión Democrática Popular

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(UDP), a left-democratic electoral front, and the COB. The former emphasizes political democracy, while the latter stresses the importance of recovering living standards lost during the dictatorship and seeking more fundamental socio-economic changes.

Probably the least developed and most problematic of these countries is Brazil, although changes there will have greater significance on a continent-wide basis over the long run. Most observers have noted the growing electoral and political influence of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB): its capacity to swamp the pro-regime ARENA party in the major industrial centers of the Southeast in the 1978 elections was one indicator of the government's political weakness. The MDB is a potpourri of political groups, ranging from conservative businessmen excluded from governing circles to developmentalists, laborites, and leftists. Its main focus is on the structuring of an electoral system in which capitalist democracy can flourish. The central ingredient in this strategy is the encouragement of opposition to the military, without, however, unduly testing the regime's basic underpinnings. The avoidance of social tension that might incite the military in the pursuit of juridical and political changes is what unites most of the factions of the MDB. The result has been the expansion of civic freedoms and increasingly outspoken criticisms of the regime.

The second tendency within the burgeoning popular opposition movement is the growth of a mass, autonomous, trade-union movement anchored in the modern industrial centers—particularly in, but not confined to, the auto and metallurgical industries. New groups of labor leaders are challenging the official appointees. In many cases workers' commissions and parallel organizations are taken much more seriously by employers during negotiations than are the official representatives. While many of the demands have focused on wage and salary issues, the underlying issue is the right of workers to form their own unions, democratically elect leaders *independently* of the government, and engage in strikes.

This autonomous movement for working-class rights, while electorally supportive of the multi-class MDB, contains within it the potential for the emergence of independent working-class

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politics. Yet the predominant tendency today is toward multi-class movements, a replay in some ways of past Brazilian politics with its popular appeals and internal contradictions. Former revolutionaries, guerrillas, and Marxist academics, as well as bourgeois nationalists and antimilitary conservatives, are all vying for control of the movement. But the boundaries of this competition are set by the military, thus eliminating anything smacking of socialism. As a result, many Marxist intellectuals have submerged themselves into the miasma of national-democratic politics. While in the sixties they debated and combated the "stage" theories of socialism, in the seventies political defeats and isolation have pushed many of them to embrace a stage theory of capitalist democracy. Hence while the popular opposition has grown substantially throughout Brazil, there has been a growing tendency toward *conservatism* among the leftist political forces, many of whom have adapted to the democratic struggles of the middle-class leadership of the movement.

(3) The third and weakest level of opposition is the incremental protest evident in countries like Chile and Argentina. The savage repression which characterized the right-wing coups in these countries seriously incapacitated the left, leaving the mass of the working class without effective national leadership and organization. The re-emergence of underground organization has been a molecular process, with the left essentially concentrating on accumulating forces, preserving cadres, and creating nuclei of supporters in factories, neighborhoods, and other political arenas. Under the stress and the harsh austerity measures, a few sectors of the workforce have occasionally struck, among them the transport workers in Argentina and the copper workers in Chile. On the whole, however, little or no sustained effort or capacity to link these struggles to other sectors has been evident.

Of the two countries Chile appears to be most clearly advancing toward the limited opening that characterizes Brazil. The Christian Democratic Party, taking advantage of the support mustered by broad sectors of the left, its own professionals and unions, the U.S. State Department and its European counterparts, has launched a series of public attacks on the Pinochet regime. The "group of ten," a Christian-Democratic-affiliated

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trade union group, had demanded the return of trade-union democracy and is pressing for legal recognition with the support of the AFL-CIO.

May Day protests, hunger strikes, and media criticism have been the opening wedges that have reflected the weakening of the Pinochet regime and may contribute to its further deterioration. The emphasis thus far has been on juridical and political rights. Sustained efforts have been made, for example, to force the regime to account for disappeared prisoners. The hope for most of the left is that once political and juridical space has been created political and social action will follow. Others on the left, while not denying the importance of legal change, are emphasizing efforts to revitalize the working-class movement as the instrument for achieving the political downfall of the junta. In both countries the emphasis of most left groups is on "broad fronts" which subsume class politics within the struggle for democracy. In Chile a substantial part of the left supports the "democratization" program of the Christian Democrats, while in Argentina both major guerrilla groups are oriented toward regrouping everyone to the left of Isabel Perón in a common front. The defeats in Chile and Argentina have led some to place socialism on a back burner and to return to the popular front politics of the thirties and forties.

Far from being a tactical nuance, this shift signals the political retreat of many leftist groups toward social democracy at best and a vague type of populist developmentalism at worst. Thus, paradoxically, while the popular opposition re-emerges from the defeats of the seventies, a substantial sector of the radical intelligentsia of the sixties is moving to the right.

(4) Finally, Paraguay and Uruguay continue to suffer the repression of an all-pervasive police state and thus have been unable to sustain or foster significant opposition. Any protest or strike is savagely repressed; terror and assassination continue on a daily basis. The massive exodus of workers, students, professionals, and young people in general has also weakened the society's capacity to revitalize itself. The most probable source of change may result from the struggles in adjacent countries—principally Brazil, the local gendarme in the area. It is possible that as the popular movement grows stronger there and is able

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to democratize institutions, pressures will increase on the Uruguayan regime to modify its rule, thus providing space for the re-emergence of a popular opposition.

Sources of Deterioration of the Right-wing Regimes

A number of significant, and in some cases self-serving, explanations have been advanced for the deterioration of the right-wing regimes and the growth of popular opposition. U.S. and Latin American liberals cite President Carter's human-rights policies and his diplomatic and economic pressures. Among the left, some cite the "general crises of capitalism," while others discount the entire oppositionist movement, referring to it as part of a U.S. plot to convert the Latin American regimes to "viable democracy." These explanations are inadequate accounts of a complex process which perhaps cannot be understood by any continent-wide generalizations. In regard to the first explanation, Carter's human-rights policy has been inconsistently applied at best and has been a rhetorical cover for continuing U.S. collaboration at worst. When public aid has ceased, private loans have more than compensated. Moreover, most of the popular opposition movements existed *prior* to Carter's intervention, and in some cases in opposition to the U.S. mediation efforts in the case of Nicaragua and to the austerity and repressive policies promoted by the U.S. through the IMF in the case of Peru. At best, Carter's policies have been directed toward aiding specific sectors of the opposition, for example the Christian Democrats in Chile and APRA in Peru.

The "general crises" thesis is even more inadequate, failing to account for any and all of the different levels of opposition in different countries or to explain the variation among groups within a country. Finally the notion that U.S. imperialism is engineering these opposition movements fails to explain why U.S. banks and economic groups continue to finance and support the repressive regimes, and why major business journals publish articles praising them. This view rather patronizingly dismisses the massive popular struggles, as if only the United States were capable of effecting change in Latin America. In this rationale, as in others, there may be one grain of truth: insofar as there is a world recession, it has limited the capacity of these regimes

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to sustain themselves in power. But the manner in which this general condition is translated into political action requires an analysis of the different political and social forces in struggle *within* these countries.

The single most important factor which has eroded the basis of neofascist and military power has been the class struggle. Each of the rightist regimes has attempted to impose "corporatist" (state-controlled) organizations on the working class and peasantry, an effort that has provided a focus for all forms of mass popular opposition. *The demand for autonomous political and social organization has been the consistent characteristic of all the emerging social movements.*

The second factor in the decline of these regimes has been the crises of the local bourgeoisie in each country. The new economic model, based largely on the collaboration of state and international capital, has relegated local business to a secondary position even in periods of expansion; in periods of downturn the lower-middle class has experienced a sharp and prolonged period of socio-economic deterioration. These factors have facilitated a movement by the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie toward political opposition and "democracy," since the dictatorial state has closed off possibilities of changing policy. The convergence of the working class and the bourgeoisie in opposition to dictatorship is thus based on different sets of class interests, although the common thread of "democracy" unites them within the specific opposition struggle.

Moreover, the opposition between dictatorial regimes and a broad array of social forces is exacerbated in particular countries by the specific features of the regime. In Nicaragua, the clannish nature of Somoza's political-economic empire hinders the development of local capital expansion, plunders small business through extortion, and lays the basis for a radicalized petty bourgeoisie denied the fruits of its own exploitation. Hence the economic growth of Somoza's empire has deepened the vulnerability of a broad array of propertied classes which have lacked their own effective political instruments for opposition, which explains the willingness of some of the civic fronts to join with the Sandinista guerrillas. This is the first time such a coalition has occurred in Latin America since the Cuban Revolution. The

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military regime in Peru that pretended to establish an extensive state sector as an instrument of national development and ended up a pawn of international financial interests likewise has alienated the local national bourgeoisie through its ownership, allocation, and organization of public enterprises. In the more recent period it has alienated the working class and peasantry through its price and income policies, embodied in so-called austerity programs.

The political-economic model of externally oriented and financed capital expansion thus contributed to the growth of bourgeoisie as well as worker struggle. The expansive periods of the 1960s marginalized local capital and increased the social and political weight of the wage and salaried groups while denying them any effective form of articulation. The recession periods of the mid-1970s which followed have weakened the regimes' internal coherence at the same time that the converging forces of labor and national capital are increasingly clamoring for representation as well as changes in policy. At the same time, the recession which has affected the world capitalist economy strengthened the hand of those national-development ideologues who were calling for a reorientation of the economy toward greater internal expansion, populist income policy, and a greater role for nationally owned consumer-goods industry. Pressure from these internal social forces in turn began to percolate into the church, the army, and among liberals in the United States. And within the United States the demand for political legitimacy in the post-Vietnam, post-Allende period gave liberals a relatively greater degree of leverage in the U.S. Congress than in the past, facilitating the convergence of their interest with those of the more conservative electoral groups in Latin America (MDB in Brazil, APRA in Peru, PDC in Chile, Frente Amplio in Nicaragua). The latter groups have now situated themselves at the heights of the popular movements; but their demands, leaders, and ideology should not be confused with the sources on which they are based—i.e., the demands of the increasingly organized workers and peasants. In some cases popular opposition is reaching the point of challenging for power (Nicaragua), while in other countries (Peru, Brazil, Bolivia) it may, in the not

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too distant future, be reaching this point. However, it may be useful to end with a word of caution.

The popular movements in many countries lack a strong centralized and disciplined organization. While this is part of the reason for their broad appeal it is also a serious weakness in terms of their capacity to launch an all-out assault on the regimes in power. In cases such as Peru the internal fragmentation has caused left organization to lag behind the popular upsurge, while in cases such as Brazil the organizational growth of the MDB has channeled political opposition into democratic electoralist channels.

This indicates one of the central features of the resurgent political movements: the resurrection of middle-class democratic movements with mass electoral bases and with influential (ex-Marxist) ideologues. The mystification of class relations through an overvaluation of so-called formal representative institutions and the de-emphasis of the class nature of the state, in short the ideological mystification of the capitalist state through an emphasis on its particular forms, can lead to the subordination of the workers' movement to bourgeois hegemony.

The opposition movements all take place within the old state apparatuses. While fascist rule at the top has weakened, the organization of repression is in place. This in fact is one of the principal arguments used by some of the democratic ideologues to restrain class struggle and politics: the need to avoid "provoking" the hardliners. Insofar as the re-emergence of political rights occurs within this state framework, social and economic changes will be severely limited and the parties of the democratic regimes may lose some of their mass appeal. Finally, U.S. support for human rights has always been conditioned by its defense of strategic interests—including large-scale corporate investments and commercial ties. Insofar as these are threatened, the United States may well be prepared to intervene against any large-scale, long-term changes.

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QUESTIONS ON THE WOMAN QUESTION

BY LISE VOGEL

The women's movement and the left confront an urgent political task: to develop a theory of women's oppression and women's liberation that is simultaneously Marxist and feminist. The problem is not new. The contemporary women's movement, now more than ten years old, has always included a strong trend—known as socialist-feminism or Marxist-feminism—that seeks to merge the two traditions so self-consciously linked with a hyphen. Similarly, the left has in recent years been forced to face weaknesses in its own practice and theory, and has begun to look for better answers to what has generally been termed "the woman question." Yet despite considerable searching and some floundering, neither merger nor answers has appeared.

The woman question hardly represents a novel social issue. From the start, capitalism shaped women's oppression and the division of labor between the sexes according to its own particular character, at the same time generating both a variety of feminist movements and a vision of women's liberation within the

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socialist movement. Nevertheless, more than a century of socialist as well as feminist practice has not, I would argue, armed us with adequate understanding of the issues involved in the liberation of women. In this article, I examine the theoretical and political terrain with a view to establishing both a clearer picture of the obstacles to progress in this area and a better path along which to move.

"Socialist-feminism" and "the woman question" are two labels that designate the same thing: a commitment among socialists to doing something about women's oppression.[1]* The two labels represent, however, quite distinct traditions—politically, theoretically, and strategically. The woman question, a term whose origins go back several centuries, has long denoted the historic socialist concern for women's emancipation. Socialist-feminism, by contrast, is a new term, introduced by socialists within the contemporary women's movement.

Politically, the socialist and the socialist-feminist movements both face the extremely difficult task of fighting for women without succumbing to either of two pressing dangers. On the one hand, they must be on guard against bourgeois feminism—the narrow struggle for equality within the bounds of capitalist society; on the other, they must not allow simplistic or economistic views of class struggle to subordinate the fight for women's liberation. To put the problem another way, socialists committed to women's liberation must find an adequate way to link the feminist struggle to the long-term struggle for political power and social transformation.

At the theoretical level, the contemporary socialist-feminist movement has inspired an extremely important effort to situate the issues of women's subordination and emancipation within a Marxist framework. This work often starts, however, from the position that Marxism is not only incomplete but incapable of internal development or expansion. Thus, it is claimed, Marxist theory must be transformed by means of the insights offered by feminist theory and practice. In short, a theoretical synthesis must take place between Marxism and feminism.

Attempts to perform this socialist-feminist synthesis have,

* Notes will be found at the end of the article.

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nonetheless, fallen rather short of the goal. For example, Juliet Mitchell's 1966 article, "Women: The Longest Revolution"—pathbreaking at the time—finds its theoretical roots in a quite conventional brand of bourgeois sociological functionalism, despite its staunchly Marxist intentions. By contrast, Eli Zaretsky's 1973 essay on "Capitalism, The Family, and Personal Life" constitutes a grab-bag of notions openly borrowed from a variety of bourgeois disciplines and "Marxist" fads. Its popularity as a representative socialist-feminist statement must be located in this all too seductive eclecticism, as well as in its skillful evasion of questions of sex conflict and male power. More recently, Heidi Hartmann's and Amy Bridges' important paper on "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" has responded to the growing discouragement among some socialist-feminists concerning the very possibility of fusing their feminist commitment with the socialist legacy. These texts, all of which have had a strong impact on activists in the women's movement and in the left, stand as monuments to the impoverished state of our theoretical development on the issue of women's subordination and liberation.[2]

Efforts to develop an adequate theory have generally been marred by an assumption that the socialist tradition on the woman question is both monolithic and easily grasped. In reality, serious ambiguities and confusion have, from the start, characterized socialist theory and practice on issues relating to women. Most important, the woman question has never received the theoretical attention it requires, with the consequence that Marxist theory remains especially weak in this area. I would argue that we should return to the theoretical tradition denoted as the woman question, but critically and with full recognition of contributions from the modern women's movement. In general, I hold that we do not need some new theoretical synthesis between Marxism—or socialism—and feminism. Rather, it is Marxist theory itself that must be developed.

II

The woman question has a long and relatively honorable history within the socialist movement. In principle, socialist theorists have always started from Marx's comment that in a

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given society, "the degree of emancipation of women is the natural measure of general emancipation."[3] In practice, socialist and communist movements have sought—as best they could, and often with lapses, weaknesses, and deviations—to involve women in social change and to raise the woman question.

But what does this peculiar woman question ask? And how is it to be answered? The notion has never been obvious. Ordinarily, the term acts as a rubric covering an assortment of important problems: women's oppression in general, the family, equal rights for women, women's differential participation in social labor and in other aspects of social life, relations between the sexes, personal and non-work relations of all sorts. For example, August Bebel, long the prestigious leader of the German Social Democratic Party and proponent of women's emancipation, argued in 1883 that "the so-called 'Woman Question' . . . concerns the position that woman should occupy in our social organism; how she may unfold her powers and faculties in all directions, to the end that she become a complete and useful member of human society, enjoying equal rights with all."[4] In the present, he observed, capitalist society stamps every facet of women's experience with oppression and inequality:

> The mass of the female sex suffers in two respects: On the one side woman suffers from economic and social dependence upon man. True enough, this dependence may be alleviated by formally placing her upon an equality before the law, and in point of rights; but the dependence is not removed. On the other side, woman suffers from the economic dependence that woman in general, the working-woman in particular, finds herself in, along with the working-man. (Bebel, *Woman,* p. 4)

Equality and liberation are thus always class as well as individual issues; and Bebel hastens to add that the "solution of the Woman Question coincides completely with the solution of the Social Question" (Bebel, *Woman,* p. 5), thereby putting the final resolution of the question into the distant future. Meanwhile, the working class constitutes women's natural strategic ally in the struggle. Moreover, Bebel suggests, participation in the revolutionary movement enables "more favorable relations between husband and wife [to] spring up in the ranks of the working class in the measure that both realize they are tugging at the same rope, and there is but one means toward satisfactory

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conditions for themselves and their family—the radical reformation of society that shall make human beings of them all." (Bebel, *Woman*, p. 115) Like most socialists, Bebel also associated the woman question with issues of sexuality, love, and human feeling.

Lenin, speaking of the "clear-cut theoretical basis" needed to build a powerful international women's movement, emphasized that "without Marxist theory we cannot have proper practice."[5] Nearly sixty years later, the left still faces the same problem. The woman question lingers as a tangled knot of disparate strands, while contemporary social practice requires that the strands be disentangled and the knot untied. More precisely, we must identify and specify theoretically the object or objects included in the category of the woman question. Only then can we begin to answer it in a successful manner.

III

Of the many elements included in the woman question, the notion of "the family" possesses the greatest ideological and psychological power. For instance, it dominates most social theory, left as well as bourgeois, which still posits a model of the family as an isolated static household consisting of a full-time and year-round wage-working husband, a permanently out-of-the-labor-force housewife, and unspecified numbers of ageless children. Yet such a norm—and the interpersonal relations it suggests—has long been in contradiction with the simplest empirical evidence. Even within capitalist societies, household structure and family experience have a range of variability that has never conformed to the model. A wide spectrum of household and family arrangements, including some with no relationship whatsoever to biological reproduction, has always existed alongside the supposedly typical "nuclear family" household: single-parent families, three-generation households, families spread across more than one household, childless-couple households, single-person living arrangements, children-only institutions, and households and institutions composed of unrelated adults. In the United States, for example, the so-called nuclear family has been, statistically speaking, a minority type among households since at least 1940. The assumption of one male

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wage-earner, working full-time and year-round is perhaps more significant. But here, too, empirical evidence conflicts with the norm, particularly for working-class households, which have almost always depended on several earners, each normally experiencing spells of unemployment. In the past, sons and daughters represented the major "second" earners, while today, wives increasingly enter the labor force. In the United States, for instance, roughly half the wives living in husband-wife households work; moreover, the trend is toward more wives working, full-time, and for more weeks in a given year.[6]

In the socialist tradition, the demand to "defend the family"—a formula whose content has never been adequately specified—appears as a recurring theme. At times the formula may have corresponded ideologically to the crucial requirement that the working class be permitted to reproduce itself under the best conditions possible—and that the processes involved in the reproduction of labor power constitute an essential aspect of the class struggle. Today, however, it resonates as a moralizing criticism of any deviation from what in fact is an illusory norm. Moreover, the so-called defense of the family has always clashed awkwardly—both in theory and in practice—with socialist commitments to, on the one hand, women's full participation in social labor and political life, and on the other, the abolition of the family as it exists in capitalist society. Socialists have too often missed the subtleties in Marx's piercing observation that "however terrible and disgusting the dissolution, under the capitalist system, of the old family ties may appear, nevertheless, modern industry, by assigning as it does an important part in the process of production, outside the domestic sphere, to women, to young persons, and to children of both sexes, creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of the relations between the sexes."[7]

In reality, the socialist movement wants to defend "the *working-class* family." Often the formula takes this somewhat more precise wording, although its substance usually remains unclear and implicitly normative. The insistence on distinguishing the working-class family from the bourgeois family is, however, essentially correct and, in fact, crucial. It signifies a recognition that the family is not an ahistorical universal but, on the

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contrary, an entity rooted in a specific society dominated by a given mode of production. While this insight has a long history within the Marxist tradition, a variety of obstacles has blocked its development. Marx and Engels used the concept of property to tie the bourgeois family to the operation of the capitalist mode of production. More generally, they attempted to derive the form of the ruling-class family in any social formation from that society's property relations. But they never developed an equally clear grasp of the working-class family as an element of the processes of social reproduction in capitalist society; even less were they concerned with theoretically situating the family in subordinate classes in non-capitalist modes of production. At most, they identified families as sites of fundamental material processes, and argued that the abolition of "the family as an economic unit of [capitalist] society" is a decisive condition for women's complete emancipation.[8]

Most subsequent treatments of the family and the woman question in the socialist movement functioned at a descriptive level. Thus, the vision of a socialist future projected in Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism* fueled the aspirations of millions of women and men around the world, but the book's theoretical contributions were minimal and its strategic imperatives vague.

These theoretical weaknesses have their roots in social practice. In the mid-nineteenth century Marx and Engels saw women rapidly entering the wage-labor force under extremely unfavorable circumstances and drew the conclusion that the working-class family was already withering away. By the end of the century, however, the socialist movement envisioned the possibility of a stable domestic life for the working class, and began an ambiguous two-pronged campaign: first, against the double oppression of working-class women in wage labor and in the family; and second, for the defense of the working-class family. Twentieth-century socialists inherit, then, a muddled tradition which has never been able to situate, *theoretically,* family, class, and mode of production in the context of the class struggle.

For example, Marxists studying contemporary capitalist societies have difficulty locating families, and individuals within them, from the point of view of class and class struggle. Some

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take the occupation of the (male) "head of household" as an index of class, and do not permit another household member's participation in the labor force to affect this family class position.[9] These procedures, which are those of bourgeois sociology, render a working wife or child invisible. Moreover, they entirely neglect persons whose maintenance and reproduction take place at sites that do not have a conventionally family-like character. Other Marxist analysts focus on the individual worker, male or female, and develop criteria of class determination that are independent of family or household membership.[10] While this approach accords class position to working women, it fails to encompass the reality of family experience, and suggests, by omission, that non-working wives and children, as well as various types of institutionalized persons, have no class existence. Similarly, many Marxists cannot distinguish between "women workers" and "working-class women," using the terms interchangeably. It may be that they take direct participation in wage labor as the sole means for class determination, in which case, all not so participating become analytically invisible. Or they may consider the distinction between participation in wage labor and membership in the working-class household to be somehow unimportant. In any case, the theoretical situation is confused and requires clarification.[11] The most serious issue concerns the class determination of persons not directly involved in wage labor: for example, non-working women, children, and disabled, aged, or institutionalized persons. Historically, the left has acted on the assumption that the members of a worker's household are themselves part of the working class. This intuition is essentially accurate, but it must be validated theoretically.

In sum, the family and the working-class family are unusually powerful ideological notions, both included within the tradition of discussion on the woman question. Because of their extremely serious analytical consequences and psychological overtones, they require a thoroughgoing critique, leading to the establishment of scientific concepts.

IV

The subject of "women's work"—more precisely, of the work that women do—constitutes another major strand in the knot of the woman question. Women's work in capitalist social

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formations includes both wage labor and unpaid work in the household. For good theoretical and historical reasons, the socialist movement has traditionally concentrated on women's wage labor. Engels provided the classical formulation when he argued that "to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time." (Engels, *Origin,* p. 221) The development of capitalism in Russia, on the foundation of a brutally patriarchal feudal culture, enabled Lenin to offer a more specific analysis of the import of participation in social labor:

> It must be stated that the drawing of women and juveniles into production is, at bottom, progressive. It is indisputable that the capitalist factory places these categories of the working population in particularly hard conditions . . .; but endeavors completely to ban the work of women and juveniles in industry, or to maintain the patriarchal manner of life that ruled out such work, would be reactionary and utopian. By destroying the patriarchal isolation of these categories of the population who formerly never emerged from the narrow circle of domestic, family relationships, by drawing them into direct participation in social production, large-scale machine industry stimulates their development and increases their independence, in other words, creates conditions of life that are incomparably superior to the patriarchal immobility of pre-capitalist relations. (Lenin, *Emancipation,* pp. 15-16)

With the victory of the revolution, Lenin pictured the contrast between wage labor and unpaid domestic work even more sharply. Again and again he emphasized that "you cannot draw the masses into politics without drawing the women into politics as well," and pointed to the obstacle that "domestic slavery" represented to women's full participation in social life. (Lenin, *Emancipation,* p. 83 and *passim*)

Despite archaisms and weaknesses—man as the norm, domestic work as the exclusive province of women, sex inequality within wage labor as a barely mentioned problem—these insights of Marx, Engels, and Lenin are essential. Theoretically, however, they remain undeveloped.

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In recent years, "housework" has become a major analytical concern among socialist-feminists and some Marxist theorists. The general problem is the relationship of unpaid domestic labor—including tasks of both daily maintenance and child-care—to social reproduction. Discussion focuses on a variety of questions, as well as on the relative importance, or even legitimacy, of the questions themselves: Is housework productive, unproductive, or a-productive labor? Is it a constant across classes? Does some form of housework—or private domestic labor—characterize all societies? Is domestic labor a form of production? A mode of production? A mode of reproduction? If domestic labor is some sort of mode of production, how does it articulate with other modes of production, for example, with the capitalist mode of production? Why does domestic labor generally fall to women? What is the class position of housewives? How best can these issues be addressed? Which among them should constitute the starting point?

The sudden urgency of the question of the theoretical status of domestic labor has its political root in the fact that women today take an increasingly active role in revolutionary struggles around the world. As problems arise in the course of facilitating this participation, the general relationship of feminist concerns to revolutionary transformation becomes a pressing matter. Thus, the debates about housework respond to political realities, although they misjudge the conceptual scope of the problem. The essential issue is the process of the reproduction of labor power, taken as a whole.

V

Inequality and the importance of the struggle for equal rights constitute essential aspects of the woman question. The socialist movement has always sought, often without success, to distinguish its position on equal rights from that of bourgeois feminism. In Bebel's lofty formulation (*Woman*, pp. 5-6), "The goal . . . is not merely the realization of the equal rights of woman with man within present society, as is aimed at by the bourgeois woman emancipationists. It lies beyond—the removal of all impediments that make man dependent upon man; and, consequently, one sex upon the other. . . . *There can be no*

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emancipation of humanity without the social independence and equality of the sexes." But goals for the future are articulated more easily than are the means to be used in the present. Moreover, the nature of women's inequality, and hence of the rights in question, must be correctly specified.

In general, socialists recognize that the equality promised by capitalism is at most formal: equal rights for the individual. Legal equality claims a special place, but the bourgeois pledge to democratic rights extends to all aspects of human experience. The early feminist movement, faced with the magnitude and intensity of woman's civil subordination within capitalist society, concentrated on obtaining a basic equality before the law. By contrast, contemporary feminism tends to focus on more subtle levels of inequality; it not only attacks surviving legal obstacles but shifts the emphasis to broader issues of social equality—that is, to what has come to be known as women's liberation. Whereas early capitalism had been able, through the promise of civil equality, to veil its inability to provide the conditions for substantive equality, contemporary imperialism cannot. Thus the issue of women's rights reveals its revolutionary edge more quickly than ever before.

Without underestimating the importance of the fight for formal equality, for the defense and extension of democratic rights, the socialist movement argues that in capitalist society, built on a foundation of class exploitation, real social equality cannot be achieved. As Lenin put it, "Capitalism combines formal equality with economic and, consequently, social inequality." (Lenin, *Emancipation,* p. 80) Why, then, do socialists insist on pursuing the struggle for democratic rights? Because it is a means for establishing and maintaining the best conditions within which to develop and carry out the class struggle, as well as an essential end in itself. Once again, Engels supplies the classic exposition:

> In the industrial world, the specific character of the economic oppression burdening the proletariat is visible in all its sharpness only when all special legal privileges of the capitalist class have been abolished and complete legal equality of both classes established. The democratic republic does not do away with the opposition of the two classes; on the contrary, it provides the clear field

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on which the fight can be fought out. And in the same way, the peculiar character of the supremacy of the husband over the wife in the modern family, the necessity of creating real social equality between them and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights. (Engels, *Origin,* p. 137)

Unfortunately, Engels' formulation—an argument by analogy—obscures the relationship between sex oppression and class struggle and instead opens the way to viewing sex and class as parallel issues. One need only add the issue of race to arrive at a quite common misconception that sex, class, and race constitute co-equal contradictions, arranged in a theoretically arbitrary moral hierarchy, and accompanied by parallel social movements.

Despite its attempt to describe the particular role of democratic rights in the struggle against capitalism, Engels' text in effect denies their special character. The experience of the Russian revolution in the context of international imperialism permitted Lenin a sharper view:

> Democracy does *not* abolish class oppression. It only makes the class struggle more direct, wider, more open and pronounced, and that is what we need. The fuller the freedom of divorce, the clearer will women see that the source of their "domestic slavery" is capitalism, not lack of rights. The more democratic the system of government, the clearer will the workers see that the root evil is capitalism, not lack of rights. The fuller national equality . . . the clearer will the workers of the oppressed nations see that the cause of their oppression is capitalism, not lack of rights, etc. (Lenin, *Emancipation,* p. 43)

In short, democratic rights within a capitalist society enable *all*—women, workers, oppressed nationalities, etc.—to participate in the class struggle on the strongest possible terms. In this sense we can agree with Engels that "the democratic republic . . . provides the clear field on which the fight can be fought out."[12]

VI

This preliminary attempt to untie the knot of the woman question and examine those strands that constitute its theoretical component provides a basis for understanding the theoretical and political confusion that has historically undermined attempts

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to resolve the woman question, as well as for delineating its current form.

Within the socialist tradition, two distinct and essentially contradictory approaches to the woman question have always coexisted, although the distinction has not been explicitly noted. An unspoken and unrecognized debate between the two alternatives has therefore haunted efforts to address a variety of major theoretical and practical questions concerning women's oppression and emancipation. The theoretical origins of this hidden debate go back to the works of Marx and Engels themselves, and it has taken concrete shape in the ambiguous theory and practice of later socialist and communist movements. The implicit controversy has recently re-appeared, this time within the contemporary women's and socialist movements. Although the hundred-year legacy of ambiguity still hampers work on the woman question, social practice in the age of imperialism—in dominant capitalist as well as subordinate Third World countries, within liberation movements, and in developing socialist nations—suggests that the conditions now exist for resolving it, both in theory and in practice.[13]

For convenience, the two approaches can be labeled according to their identification of the source, or principal site, of women's oppression. On the one hand, the "family argument": women are oppressed because of the family. On the other, the "social-production argument": women's oppression has its roots in women's place within social production. In the first view, women's situation within the family explains their exclusion, or partial exclusion through deformed participation, from social labor and political life. In the second, the differential location of women within social production lies at the heart of their oppression in the family as well as in other spheres. Each argument suggests its own analysis of the various elements that make up the theoretical core of the woman question: family, work, and equal rights.

The family argument starts from what appears to be empirically obvious: the family, the oppression of women, and divisions of labor and authority according to sex. It treats these phenomena as analytically separable, at least in part, from the social relations of production in which they are embedded. Thus

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it identifies the family, and the sex division of labor within it, as the fundamental source of women's oppression, and then seeks to understand the origin and development of this correlation in history. To the extent that the family is tied to the mode of production dominant in a given society and varies according to class, these factors enter the discussion as essential, but more or less external, determinants.

The family argument constituted the theoretical underpinning to most nineteenth-century socialist considerations of the woman question. It pervades Bebel's *Woman Under Socialism,* and dominates Engels' rather contradictory exposition in the *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.* Within the contemporary socialist-feminist movement, the family argument often appears in the context of attempts to develop a "theory of patriarchy." Such a theory would account for the special character of women's oppression, most particularly in the family, without denying the class struggle. Just as Marxism has discovered the laws that govern social production and class struggle, so the theory of patriarchy will reveal the material mechanisms that underlie sex divisions of labor and women's oppression. Or, as many have suggested—basing themselves on Engels' remark that "the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life" (Engels, *Origin*, p. 71)—Marxism explains the mode of production, while the theory of patriarchy will explain the mode of reproduction.

Whether explicitly proposing a theory of patriarchy or not, all versions of the family argument imply a certain parallelism between class and sex phenomena. Thus they project, more or less clearly, a series of counterposed pairs: production/reproduction; work/family; class exploitation/patriarchal oppression; public sphere/private domain; social productive labor/private domestic labor; class system/family system; ruling-class domination/male privilege; Marxist theory/theory of patriarchy. From these pairs it is but a step to a more serious conclusion. Logically, the family argument suggests that some systematic mechanism, peculiar to the family and distinct from the class struggle characterizing a given mode of production, constitutes the driving force behind women's oppression. In short, according

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to the theory implicit in the family argument, two equally powerful motors fuel the development of history: the class struggle and the sex struggle.

Finally, theories that project parallel struggles of different sectors—for example, class, sex, and race—encounter serious problems when they attempt to analyze the relationships among the various struggles. Theoretically, parallel struggles can never really intersect. Instead, to use the analogy of parallel railroad tracks, they simply appear to meet in the far distance, while actually remaining rigidly separate. As a consequence, a socialist strategy that holds to the family argument has great difficulty relating the fight for women's liberation to the overall revolutionary struggle. Such a strategy either takes the form of a women's movement that must guard its own autonomy with the practical zeal appropriate to its theoretical stance; or it puts the woman question off to the revolutionary future, while current activity subordinates so-called women's issues to the class struggle, economistically conceived. To return to the image of the railroad tracks, the first approach recognizes the true parallelism of the tracks, their permanent separateness, but thereby becomes vulnerable to bourgeois feminist errors. By contrast, the second approach falls victim to the illusion of convergence at the revolutionary horizon, while collapsing the two tracks into one for the purposes of present action: on such a railroad, no truly revolutionary train can run.

VII

The social production argument starts from the theoretical position that class struggle in the realm of social production represents the central dynamic of all social development. In this view, the concept of social production refers to the entire process of the reproduction of the social conditions of production, comprising processes of exchange and consumption as well as of immediate production. Before discussing specific institutions—for example, the family—within a given society, the particular mode of production dominating that society must be identified. For class societies, the category of the family "as such" therefore has no real meaning; instead, families only exist within different classes. In dominant classes, the family usually acts

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as the carrier and transmitter of property, although it may also have other functions. In subordinate classes, the family usually structures the site at which labor power—the individual's capacity to work which existing social relations put at the disposal of the dominant class—is maintained and reproduced.

The maintenance and reproduction of labor power is indispensable for social reproduction, yet it takes place, as it were, at the margins of social production. Women in subordinate classes have historically been assigned major responsibility for the activities that ensure the maintenance and reproduction of labor power. Furthermore, women's place within the sex division of labor characterizing these activities both affects and is affected by their participation in social labor performed for the dominant class. In a given class society, the oppression of women in subordinate classes is rooted in their particular relationship to the processes of maintenance and reproduction of labor power, on the one hand, and to social labor, on the other.

Activity at the margins of social production necessarily has certain implications for the agents involved. For example, the capitalist mode of production forces a rigorous separation, at the economic level, between most aspects of social production and what Marx called individual consumption—which includes the material processes of unpaid domestic labor. In a given capitalist social formation, individuals who find themselves totally or partially marginalized with respect to social production because of involvement in these processes occupy a specific location within the social division of labor, with specific political, ideological, and psychological effects.

The social production argument does not take the family and the working-class family as givens, for they involve concepts that must be constructed within Marxist theory. This construction is part of the work of producing a scientific theory of the reproduction of labor power, a task that cannot be attempted here. Some of its characteristics are, however, already clear and can be schematically indicated. "The family" represents a concept that is specific with respect both to mode of production and to class. Thus the term's seemingly ahistorical classlessness in fact acts as a pernicious ideological mask to obscure the class struggle. For the capitalist mode of production,

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the notion of "the working-class family" actually refers to the site and agents of the process of reproduction of labor power as a commodity, carried out in a specific social formation. This formulation allows for the great variety of social structures that function as such sites. Moreover, the class place of "family" members who participate in wage labor provides the key to articulating "the family" with the class structure.[11] The actual class position and experience of individual "family" members in a specific conjuncture constitute, of course, another question. In particular, political, ideological, and psychological factors play an especially important role for an individual "family" member—for example, a non-working wife, an aged person, a school-age child—who does not participate directly in social labor.

The social production argument suggests that the essence of the so-called woman question in capitalist societies is twofold. In the first place, women inherit—from a historically preexisting sex division of labor—the major responsibility for the processes involved in individual consumption and the reproduction of labor power as a commodity. Therefore, much of their activity appears to be unpaid services performed for wage-earning men, giving rise to a serious potential for sexual antagonism. In the second place, women, like many other groups in capitalist society, lack full democratic rights, and their political struggle to acquire these rights provides another possible source of sex conflict. In sum, women's oppression in societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production has a dual origin in their particular situation with respect to social production and equal rights. Of the two, women's confinement to domestic labor represents the major barrier to their real liberation. As Lenin put it:

> The female half of the human race is doubly oppressed under capitalism. The working woman and the peasant woman are oppressed by capital, but over and above that, even in the most democratic of the bourgeois republics, they remain, firstly, deprived of some rights because the law does not give them equality with men; and secondly—*and this is the main thing*—they remain in "household bondage," they continue to be "household slaves," for they are overburdened with the drudgery of the most squalid and backbreaking and stultifying toil in the kitchen and the individual household. (Lenin, *Emancipation*, pp. 83-84, italics added)

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For historical reasons, the social production argument is even less developed at the theoretical level than the family argument. Moreover, the socialist tradition has evolved a peculiar polarization between practice and theory on the woman question. Practice is generally based on a narrow misinterpretation of the social production argument, while theory relies on eclectic and confused versions of the family argument. Socialists have only rarely recognized the existence of these contradictions, much less attempted to resolve them.[15] Yet it is the social production argument that accords most closely with Marx's analysis of the workings of the capitalist mode of production.

VIII

Not surprisingly, the family and the social production arguments have differing political and strategic correlates. The question here is the relationship of the feminist struggle to the development of social revolution. With its implicit assumption of co-equal oppressions, the family argument logically supports a strategy of parallel movements: the women's movement, the black movement, the trade-union movement. While various agendas can be proposed to federate or integrate these struggles in the course of revolutionary development, the fundamental character of sex oppression would imply that autonomous women's caucuses should function permanently, as a matter of principle, at all organizational levels.

The social production argument takes class struggle, properly understood, to be central, which makes unity of the revolutionary forces the major task. Trade unions, as well as mass organizations around specific issues—for example, women's oppression, black oppression, support for anti-imperialist liberation movements, and so forth—would always play a critical role, but their existence and character would be a matter of strategy and tactics, based on concrete investigation of particular situations. Within a revolutionary party, problems arising from the pervasive nature of sex oppression and male dominance would be addressed as serious questions of cadre development, political line, and organizational strategy. Clearly, the social production argument accords with the general tradition of Marxism-Leninism, although a thorough and consistent practice on the woman

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question has not characterized Marxist-Leninist parties in the past. Contemporary developments in revolutionary movements around the world offer hope, however, for the future.

The demarcation between the two arguments concerning the woman question has never been clearly drawn. In the present period, many women in North America and Europe identify with the socialist-feminist movement or stand apart, as independent socialists, from existing organizations, for want of a better alternative. At the same time, most Marxist-Leninist groups, racked by inexperience, contemptuous of the women's movement, and fearing bourgeois-feminist errors, simply attack socialist-feminism without analyzing its content. For theoretical guidance, they rely on the confused tradition handed down from the international communist movement, endlessly repeating various formulations from Marx, Engels, and Lenin, while ignoring contradictions and lacunae. Ultimately, however, the choice that confronts all of us is that between much of what is now called socialist-feminism and a developed Marxist position on women. Our responsibility, then, is to face this choice honestly. The stakes involved are nothing less than social revolution and the liberation of women.

NOTES

1. While socialism and Marxism are of course not synonymous, I use the terms socialist-feminism and Marxist-feminism interchangeably, following ordinary practice within the contemporary women's movement. Socialist-feminism is not, moreover, the exclusive province of women: the New American Movement calls itself a socialist-feminist organization. Readers will note that the discussion in this article challenges the conceptual viability of many notions—for example, the woman question, the family, the working-class family, the nuclear family, housework, and so forth. Such terms are therefore introduced within quotation marks. Although these marks are omitted in subsequent passages, the highly questionable character of the terms should be borne in mind whenever they appear.
2. These few remarks barely summarize what in fact is an extremely complex situation. Socialist-feminism, or Marxist-feminism, is not a monolithic trend, and it offers much that is valuable and attractive. Most important, many have turned to so-called socialist-feminism in the absence of a sufficiently developed theoretical and practical commitment to women's liberation within the rest of the left. The articles cited are: Juliet Mitchell: "Women: The Longest Revolution," *New Left Review*, no. 40 (November-December 1966); Eli Zaretsky, "Capitalism, The Family, and Personal Life," *Socialist Revolution*,

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nos. 13-15 (January-June 1973); Heidi Hartmann and Amy Bridges, "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union," forthcoming in a collection to be published by South End Press. Joan Landes offers a trenchant critique of Mitchell's theoretical framework in "Women, Labor, and Family Life: A Theoretical Perspective," *Science and Society*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Winter 1977-1978). Hartmann's and Bridges' piece constitutes the subject of the other articles collected in the forthcoming South End Press book. Zaretsky's work remains to be evaluated in print.

3. This formulation, usually attributed to Fourier, is actually a significantly altered paraphrase of Fourier's remarks in *Théorie des quatre mouvements* (Paris: Pauvert, 1967), p. 147. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family* (Moscow, 1975), p. 230, and Engels, *Anti-Dühring* (Moscow, 1975), p. 308.
4. August Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 1.
5. V. I. Lenin, *The Emancipation of Women* (New York: International Publishers, 1966), p. 97.
6. Nancy Smith Barrett of the Urban Institute estimates that fewer than 16 percent of U.S. households in 1976 consisted of a working husband, a wife not in the labor force, and one or more children under 18 ("Data Needs for Evaluating the Labor Market Status of Women," unpublished paper 1978). The Department of Labor observes that "the notion persists that the 'average' family is made up of a husband, a nonworking wife, and two children. In actuality, this type of four-person family accounts for only seven percent of all husband-wife families." (*Employment in Perspective: Working Women*, BLS. Report 531, April 1978) For married women's participation in the labor force, see Howard Hayghe, "Families and the Rise of Working Wives —An Overview," *Monthly Labor Review*, vol. 99, no. 5 (May 1976).
7. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow, n.d.), p. 460.
8. Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), pp. 137-139.
9. For example, Albert Szymanski, "Trends in the American Working Class," *Socialist Revolution*, no. 10 (July-August 1972); and Charles Anderson, *The Political Economy of Social Class* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
10. For example, Nicos Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975).
11. The same comments hold for the frequent identification by Marxists of "workers" and "the working class."
12. These remarks situate the issue of women's equality within the context of the general struggle for democratic rights in capitalist societies. The problem remains, however, of the theoretical specificity of sex as opposed to race oppression. At the economic level, the obvious place to look for this specificity with respect to the so-called woman question is the area of unpaid household labor, an activity associated with divisions of labor and inequality according to sex but not with divisions according to race or nationality. Yet the near invisibility of this domestic labor within Marxist theory, at least until recently, has blocked any attempts in this direction. The labor involved in housework has been curiously ignored, despite its enormous quantitative

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magnitude, and women's situation within the family has been treated essentially as a question of democratic rights and ideological oppression. In any case, unless the theoretical distinction between sex and race oppression is clarified, the danger persists of first paralleling and then ranking them—and of thus falling into an unscientific and moralistic conception of the fight for democratic rights.

13. The remarks in this and the following sections summarize, in extremely compressed form, arguments to be developed in a longer study, still in progress, tentatively titled, "Elements of a Theory of 'The Family,'" and in a forthcoming book, *The Earthly Family*, by Lise Vogel.
14. For a preliminary discussion of variant family forms in these terms, see Lise Vogel, "The Contested Domain: A Note on the Family in the Transition to Capitalism," *Marxist Perspectives*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Spring 1978).
15. Within the left wing of the Second International, figures such as Clara Zetkin and Lenin launched an implicit critique of the family argument. Lenin's emphasis on the problem of domestic labor was unique. Interestingly, the contemporary socialist-feminist effort to merge Marxism with feminism represents, whether its adherents know it or not, an important attempt to close the gap between theory and practice that was opened in the earlier socialist and communist movement.

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THOSE NINETEENTH-CENTURY CRITICS

By Earl Smith

In the December 1978 issue of MONTHLY REVIEW, Louis Harap ("Profit and Illth: From Carlyle To Ruskin To Morris") correctly calls our attention to some of the early English works that condemned a burgeoning world-wide system of capitalism.

What I would like to bring to the attention of MR readers is that Carlyle, who could pen a most penetrating critique of capitalism in his *Past and Present* (1843), six years later in a relatively unknown article ("Occasional Discourse On The Negro Question," *Fraser's Magazine,* December 1849)* put forward an incoherent ideological piece of racist literature of a kind not uncommon to many European intellectuals of that epoch.

In this essay (which predates Stanley Elkins' *Slavery* and Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman's *Time On The Cross* by over a century) Carlyle (of whom Harap says "his progressive ideas exerted enormous influence on his contemporaries") wrote one of the most vicious apologetics for the exploitation of black people that was taking place in the Caribbean and the American South.

Earl Smith is a member of the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at the State University of New York, Brockport.

* Later expanded into a pamphlet under the title *Occasional Discourse On The Nigger Question*, London, 1853.

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In this essay Carlyle portrays black people as biologically inferior to whites, and therefore in need of permanent guidance. The main character that Carlyle creates is Quashee, a lazy-do-nothing black man whom Elkins later fantasized about in his best seller, even if not by name. Quashee has rhythm, and he can also sing. He eats watermelon too!

Further, according to Carlyle, Quashee and other blacks are only worthy of freedom when white men decide they are ready: as Carlyle put it, "Happy he who has found a master." Harap ends his essay saying "the basic features of capitalism have remained," but he doesn't mention one of its most prominent features—*racism*.

We still need to remind certain intellectual liberals that until racism is abolished, capitalism will continue to infest the world. The objective of capitalism is exploitation which leads to the creation of profits. The concoction of racist mythology remains one of the chief means to further that objective, which must be combated wherever and whenever it is manifest.

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(*Continued from inside front cover*)

Society which is 13 years older than MR (and of which one of the editors of MR was an original sponsor). For us, and so far as we could judge for most everyone else there, the evening was an enjoyable and memorable occasion.

This month's Review of the Month is devoted to problems of labor productivity in the United States and the myths which have grown up around the subject, mostly designed to serve the most reactionary ends: repressing wages, squeezing more labor out of workers, limiting environmental-protection and job-safety and health measures, and reducing corporate taxes. After the piece was written, a letter by Seymour Melman appeared in *The New York Times* (May 18) which attempts to turn the "collapsing productivity" thesis to the progressive purpose of cutting back the military budget. Since Melman is a professor of industrial engineering and a respected antiwar activist, his argument deserves more careful attention than we can give it in this space. Nevertheless, we think a brief comment, a sort of footnote to the Review of the Month, is called for. Nothing needs to be added to what we called the "false alarm" character of the "collapsing productivity" thesis itself: that's what the Review of the Month is all about. But a caution is needed with regard to Melman's argument that the slower rate of growth of manufacturing productivity in the United States compared to Germany and Japan results from the much greater (relative to GNP) military budget in this country. There are three points to be made here: (1) There is absolutely no guarantee, or even strong reason to suppose, that a reduction of the military budget here would be followed by more investment in productivity-increasing research and technology. (2) During the period cited by Melman (1965-1975), not only manufacturing productivity but also manufacturing output increased more rapidly in Germany and Japan than in the United States. This is important because it has long been known that productivity rises much more vigorously in rapidly expanding than in slowly expanding industries (cf. the classic study of John W. Kendrick, *Productivity Trends in the United States*, covering the period 1899-1953). And (3) differences in the position and strategies of U.S. imperialism compared to the German and Japanese varieties have certainly played an important role. Germany and Japan have been primarily exporters and hence domestic producers of industrial products, especially those in which both output and productivity were growing rapidly; whereas U.S. capital in the form of multinational corporations has concentrated on building or buying up factories to produce abroad. If the overall rate of growth of productivity of U.S. multinational corporations (at home and abroad) were compared with the rates of growth of productivity achieved by their German and Japanese counterparts, the results would certainly look quite different from those cited by Melman.

We of course have no quarrel with Melman's insistence on the importance of reducing the military budget. But at the same time we believe it is also important to be wary of falling into the traps set by ruling-class ideology. As argued in the Review of the Month, we must firmly reject the idea that rapidly rising labor productivity is crucial to the welfare of the people of an industrially advanced capitalism. And the reason for the struggle to reduce the monstrous military budget of this country is surely not to open up new channels of capital accumulation but to advance the interests of the working class and to protect our own people and peoples all over the world from the devastation and suffering of more and bigger wars.

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